WHERE SALMON ARE PLENTIFUL.

By Julian Ralph.

STUPENDOUS as what we call "fish stories" often are, none reaches such grand proportions as those about the abundance of salmon in Oregon, Washington Territory, and the waters of British Columbia and Alaska. Once upon a time it was held to be sufficient proof that a statement was true, if any one could say he had seen it in "black and white." Perhaps we owe it to the so-called fishermen's yarns that this limit upon the marvelous is swept away. Next it was said that "figures can not lie," but to-day even that is no longer admitted. There now remain only two sources of information that the most scrupulous folks never question. One is what they see with their own eyes, and the other is what the honest single eye of a photographer's camera sees. The astonishing picture of salmon, here presented, is one of the sights of the camera about which there can be no dispute. The original photograph from which the illustration was drawn was made on the bank of Gordon Creek, near the village of Yale, in British Columbia, at the time when the salmon were rushing up the stream, in the annual summer journey which they make from the sea up the fresh water-courses, for the purpose of laying their eggs and hatching their young. You can see that seldom has there been a plum-pudding so filled with raisins as is this water with these great, swift, delicious fish. And, from what is known of such scenes, it is absolutely certain that the mass of fish was denser farther under the water than it was at the surface where the illustration shows them.

A story that the old settlers of Oregon never tire of telling, recounts that a stage-coach was once upset by these fishes while it was being drawn across a ford over a little river. The huge fish pressed against the coach, rising higher and higher on one another's backs as the ones in the rear pushed ahead over those that were stopped by the stage. Presently they rose in such a mighty wall, and all continued to push so hard, that the stage rolled over. This story is not vouched for by any one in particular, and so must be classed with those other fishermen's tales that are almost as numerous as the salmon in question. But the reports that are made about this fish by men whose word no one disputes are scarcely less remarkable. Mr. J. K. Lord, the author of a book called "The Naturalist in Vancouver and British Columbia," says that the salmon swim one thousand miles from the sea up the Columbia River and fill even the pools left by the receding tide on the sides of the river. "They are seen to crowd shallow streams," he says, "so as to push one another high and dry on the banks." Once, when he was riding on horseback through that wild country, he came upon a stream so thickly filled with salmon that it was difficult to get his horse through the mass. He speaks of them as sometimes weighing seventy pounds, but in Alaska they have been known to attain far greater weight than that. The salmon can swim faster than the swiftest railroad train can move, and are so strong and quick that they are able to leap small cataracts in the streams.

Just as the Indians of the plains, who were hunters, used to live upon the buffaloes that ranged the prairies in numbers no man could either count or estimate, so the Indians of the Pacific coast of this continent, who are sailors and fishermen, lived upon the salmon. It was Nature's plan that the fish should be as numerous as these stories and this picture represent them. The Indians depended upon spearing the fish or, at best, upon dipping them up with baskets on long poles, and could only reach those nearest the land, for the principal rivers are broad and swift and, when full of salmon, navigation of them in canoes was not safe, even if it was possible. Now, the salmon and the Indians are both far less numerous within our borders. Since the Indians catch them and the Chinese clean and can them for the merchants, who ship them all over the world, the fish become annually less abundant, and they are caught in vast numbers in ingenious nets, and by great floating wheels made to be revolved by the current and dip them up by the thousand.

On the Washington Territory side of the Columbia River, a few little bands of red men come every summer to scoop and spear the salmon; but at the same place fifty years ago, historians tell us, the ancestors of these Indians came in such numbers that the shores were divided between them, and every ledge and rock and bit of bank had its right-

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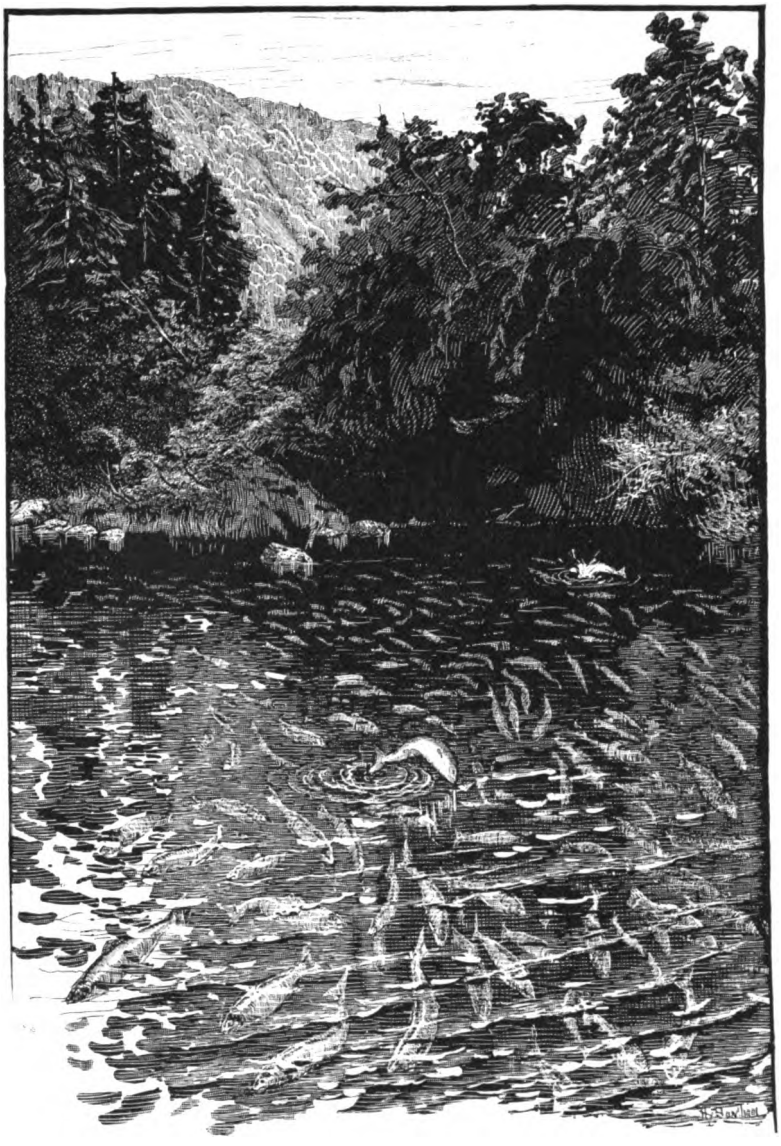

A SALMON BROOK IN BRITISH COLUMBIA. (DRAWN FROM A PHOTOGRAPH.)

ful tenants. Their tents of skin were set all about the background, each sending up its thread of smoke from the fires at which the squaws cooked the meals, and their ponies roamed close at hand. The Indians fished until they caught all they needed, and these they dried for use during the following winter.

Ivan Petroff, who wrote for our Government all that he could find out about its great cold Territory of Alaska, describes just such scenes there at this day, for there the salmon and the Indians are both as plentiful as ever. He says that the Kaniags, a tribe of Eskimo Indians, pile the dried salmon in heaps around the sides of the interior of each house so as to make a high, broad shelf of the fish. But when they catch an extra quantity they spread them over the floor, layer upon layer, several feet deep. They live upon this strange floor, taking up what salmon they need day by day and eating their way gradually down to the real floor during the winter.

The Yukon is the great salmon river of Alaska, as well as one of the greatest rivers, in all other respects, in the world. The wisest men are uncertain whether it does or does not pour more water into the sea than the great Mississippi. It sends out so much that the water of the ocean is fresh ten miles from the coast, and the river is so great that at a distance of six hundred miles from its mouth it is more than a mile wide. In places it is twenty miles wide, and the total length of the river is eighteen hundred miles. The Yukon gives its name to the largest district in Alaska, and "in this region," Mr. Petroff says, "during the brief summer there, the whole population flocks to the river banks, attracted by myriads of salmon, crowding the waters in their annual pilgrimage up this mighty stream. Then both banks are lined with summer villages and camps of fishermen who build their basket-traps far out into the eddies and bends of the stream. This annual congregation completely drains of human life the valleys and plains stretching away to the north and south, as well as many of the lake-regions in the west."

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